



Siththadi Kathayee Amman

-Santhipriya-

Siththadi Kathayee Amman

1. Over six hundred years old Goddess Kathayee (who is in the other form of Goddess Valli, the consort of Lord Muruga) temple exist in a small village called Sithadi which is in Kumbakonam and Mayavaram route in Kodavasal block of Tiruvarur District in the state of Tamil Nadu. This small temple has been built on a vast temple land on the banks of river Mudikondan. Village Sithadi 33 KM away from Mayavaram and 13 KMs from Kumbakonam can be reached through Nannilam.
2. There are myths and folk lore across Indian continent in varied significance on Village deities, one amongst them being Goddess Kathayee. Based on a lore one believe that the worship of Goddess Kathayee may have existed since thousands of years ago in the villages near Kaveri delta and parts of Chola mandala which consisted of territories of present-day Thanjavur, Mayuram, Trichy, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram etc in which half the lands were agricultural or barren fields. Some of the learned pundits suggest that even prior to the rule of Chola Kings, say before 1500 to 2000 years, worship of Goddess Kathayee may have prevailed in some of the villages controlled by the Chola Kings.
3. Even today Goddess Kathayee remains tutelary deity of many families whose ancestors lived in the villages around Kaveri delta and adapted her as their family deity. This impression is gained in view of few temples in the name of Goddess Kathayee is seen in some of the villages in the

Kaveri delta where she is worshiped as village deity or Grama devatha earlier even to this date.

4. Some also believe that Lord Muruga married Goddess Valli in the present temple site of Siththadi even though there are stories to suggest that Lord Muruga married Goddess Valli in Kathirkamam, a village in Sri Lanka. Therefore, let us understand who Goddess Kathayee Amman is. You will find stories in Puranas and legends, suggesting that several of the divines taking birth in human form to atone sins and to get freed from the curses incurred by them on various accounts; on account of curses received, even few of the divine pairs (consorts) had stayed away from each other for several thousand years before their curses were redeemed. At the end of the curse, when they reunited they remarried their partner divines.

5. The status of separation and remarriage of the divines were temporary disconnect which existed between them for some reason. These curses, often received from some of the powerful sages or other deities, serve as lessons about karma, humility, and the consequences of one's actions, even for the most powerful gods. At the end of the period of the penance the divines re-unite by way of shadow function which is similar to the marriage organized in public before celestials.

6. Not each one of the divine pairs who remained separated enacted the drama of re-marriage when they re united. According to the learned pundits, the act of re-marriage of the divines, was indeed shadow marriage performed complying to the genuine wishes of many saints, celestial and rishi, munis who could not witness the divine marriages held earlier, but desired to see their marriage.

Such remarried divines according to the Puranas included divines like Lord Shiva-Goddess Parvathi, Lord Vishnu-Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Muruga with Goddess Valli. In this background we can certainly believe that Lord Muruga may have married Goddess Valli in Siththadi village and also in Kathirkamam in Sri Lanka before Goddess Valli turned into Goddess Kathayee in Sithadi.

7. There are several folk tales and lore on Goddess Kathayee. The very fact that Goddess Kathayee worship is seen in some of the villages in Kaveri delta indicate that she must have been worshiped as village deity in those villages like any other village deities. The village deities are generally worshipped to protect the villages from the attacks of evil spirits and ghosts tormenting the villagers and also protect them from the acts of natural disorders.

8. While most of the village deities called grama devathas are worshiped in non agamic form of worship, only in Siththadi temple she is being worshipped with agamic rites which itself speak of the glory of Sithadi Goddess Kathayee. Interestingly one can also see another temple which exists for Goddess Kathayee in the same Sithadi village where she is worshiped in the form of a village deity.

9. Going by word-of-mouth stories and the temple lore, one tend to believe that most of the shrines for Goddess Kathayee in Kaveri delta may have sprung up only after Goddess Kathayee temple surfaced in Sithadi village. It is also true that other than Siththadi Kathayee temple, none of temples in the villages around the Kaveri delta have temple history of their own or on the manifestation of Goddess Kathayee; the probable periods in which they had come up is also not clearly known.

10. During Chola dynasty, temples for Goddess Kathayee may have sprung up in few of the villages, reason being, Goddess Kathayee has been the family deity of some of the Chola Kings. King Vikarama Chola-I who succeeded King Rajaraja Chola has worshipped Goddess Kathayee as his family deity. This information is found in the temple history of Kattu Mannaar temple of Goddess Kathayee. The temple is reportedly 500 years old one. Goddess Kathayee is being named as Poonguraththi meaning 'Fowler community lady'. Once the Goddess has met the main adversaries of the King in the form of a tribal (Fowler) lady and settled their dispute in peaceful manner. Therefore, the Chola King enshrined a statue of Goddess Kathayee by the side of Goddess Pachchai Vaazhi Amman (Goddess Parvathi) in the temple and worshipped her here. Since most of the time Goddess Parvathi appeared in green saree, she may have been nicknamed as Pachchai Vaazhi Amman, Pachchai meaning green colour.

11. A black granite stone depicts Goddess Kathayee in the Sithadi temple, holding a lotus blossom in her right hand; her left hand is resting on her left thigh, which in turn is resting on the pedestal over which she is seated; a saint can be seen sitting below her left leg. In contrast to this appearance, Goddess Kathayee is depicted in the majority of the Kaveri delta's temples as vibrant terracotta statues that hold a child in their lap or in her left hand; in other temples, she is only visible up to her waist and is either positioned on the ground or above a pedestal.

12. Doubts were cast on how the sculpted granite statue has been established in Sithadi temple alone. During the rule of Chola Kings, bigger and smaller temples have been

built in several places in which the appearances of the divines have been sculpted on granite stones by the sculptors as per Shilpa Shastra which prescribe certain dimensions and features for each of the deities. However, the Sithadi Kathayee temple has not been constructed by any of the Chola Kings and has its own story which is given at the later part of the article.

13. There were numerous occasions when many temples and smaller shrines were destroyed in war or submerged in deluge or buried due to natural calamities such as heavy floods and cyclones besides attack from invading enemy forces of other Kingdom.

14. The ruins of temples and intricate granite sculptures found in the Kaveri Delta stand testimony to the masterful stonework, notable for its precision and durability during Chola dynasty (9th–13th centuries). Quite possibly the idol of Goddess Kathayee enshrined in Sithadi temple may have also been from one of those ruined shrines submerged into the river and found in Sithadi by the Brahman priest. It is only an assumption.

15. Look at the case of Lord Vaitheeswaran temple in the Kaveri delta. Initially five temples of Lord Vaitheeswaran existed in that area. For some reason or the other, two in them got destroyed; reason not known. One of the temples in them, huge in size and built nearly 1300 years ago in vast acres of land is in Manippallam Village near Seerkazhi. Hundreds of years ago they may have been completely vandalized by invading forces or thieves. The broken pillars and culverts of that Vaitheeswaran temple, found strewn everywhere in an area of nearly one acre stand testimony

to the fact that a huge temple may have existed in that village with finely carved statues and pillars.

16. Those who have reconstructed the said temple, much smaller in size, with the remains of the dilapidated temple claim that some of the beautifully sculptured idols may have been stolen away by thieves or smuggled to states like Kerala and enshrined in some temples, leaving away partially broken statues and artifices. The second Lord Vaitheeswaran temple still remains in shambles in an interior village under roof of a hut. Both the temples have beautifully sculpted statues of divines including Shiva Linga. These details can be read in the temple history of Manippallam Vaitheeswaran temple written by me.

17. See the second case of nine Shiva Linga temples reportedly established by Lord Murugan. Before Lord Muruga went on war with Soorapadman, he was to receive a powerful weapon called Vel (Trident) from Goddess Parvathi. However, she advised Lord Muruga that before receiving the Vel, Lord Muruga should first offer prayers in nine Shiva temples in and around Sikkal (near Tiruvarur) where he could finally enshrine himself after annihilating Sooran.

18. Accordingly, Lord Muruga established nine temples for Lord Shiva in nine villages namely Perumkadambanur, Kadambaravazhkai Vallamangalam, Pattamangalam, Sottalvannam, Thiruthevoor and Othiyoor in and around Sikkal, offered prayers there and then only went to receive the Vel from Goddess Parvathi.

19. Today those ruined temples remain completely in dilapidated condition, unable to even offer worship and some of the beautifully sculpted granite stone idols of

divines including Shiva Linga which are found scattered in open fields and worshiped by locals.

20. In similar manner it is quite possible that several thousand years ago Goddess Kathayee's idol made of granite stone may have been enshrined in some temple and may be in nature's fury, or other calamities, the shrine may have been damaged and idols in them drown into the river during flood or were buried in some sort of quakes. Since Goddess Kathayee wanted to stay there, she may have enacted a drama through Kanchamalai muni to get her re-established in the same site through the local Brahmin who took out her idol from inside the river.

21. Reading stories in Purana one will find that many divines who came to Bhooloka to redeem their curses, sat in tapas, invisible to others in isolated places for several thousand years. Some of the divines who stayed in the form of humans for some cause, when returned back to Devaloka left their human body in the same form in which they lived in earth. The bodies being divine, never perished and over centuries they may have turned into granite stones retaining the same form in which they lived.

22. It is therefore possible that Goddess Valli in the form of Goddess Kathayee with three headgears too may have stayed in the present temple site of Sithadi and when she went back to Devaloka along with Lord Muruga, she may have left behind her divine energies into her human body which may have remained buried inside the land. Over the years when Mudikondan river flew over the same land, the idol of Goddess Kathayee with three headgears may have been sunk, to be found and taken out centuries later to get enshrined in Sithadi village temple. The granite stone idols

of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupathi and Lord Shiva in Kedarnath and Badrinath support such belief- divines in human form turns into granite idols retaining same appearance.

23. Generally, Goddess Valli is seated in several temples flanked by Lord Muruga or enshrined in separate sanctum sanctorum as Goddess Valli. But in some of the village temples Kathayee is seen holding a child in her hand. Why should Goddess Kathayee portray with a child in hand? This raises doubt whether the female deity with child in hand is indeed Kathayee Amman?

24. According to a folklore, a distressed woman tried to commit suicide by jumping into the fire along with her child to prove her chastity. Suddenly an elderly woman appeared from somewhere, jumped into the fire and brought out the child unharmed. Thereafter the elderly lady was never seen around began to be worshipped as an angel (devatha) who saved the child and therefore the form of a woman holding a child in her hand came to be installed and worshiped in the name of Goddess Kathayee (Kaaththa + Aayee =Kathayee). Kaaththa meaning the one who saved, and Aayee an elderly woman.

25. Based on this story, initially in few of the villages a lady with a child in hand were installed and began to be called as Kathayee Amman meaning Celestial who saved the child. The villagers did not imagine her to be Goddess Valli or viewed her as consort of Lord Muruga and only after the lore on Sithadi Kathayee Amman began to spread, the villagers started worshiping the lady with child in hand, also called Kathayee as consort of Lord Muruga, since the name Kathayee was similar.

26. According to few of the folklore she was one amongst the seven Saptha Kannikas who stand guard to Goddess Parvathi while few others say that she was the daughter of Saint Kathyayana, hence called Kathayee. The arguments appear to be incorrect as no puranic evidence is adduced and they are based on word of mouth spread folklore only.

27. As per the legend of Kaattu Mannar temple, the child in the hand of the lady (claimed as Goddess Kathayee by locals) was none but Lord Muruga only, but then few questioned why the female deity should carry Lord Muruga in the form of a child? Perhaps this belief might have stemmed from the puranic story in which Goddess Kathayee was one of the Saptha Kannikas (seven virgin ladies) who picked up child Muruga from the reed bush and brought him up after the divine energies of both Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi merged and created Lord Muruga in the form of a child and left him lying in reed bush near a river. However, none doubt that Goddess Kathayee in her original form was Goddess Valli, the consort of Lord Muruga.

28. Learned pundits opine that Goddess Kathayee holding a child symbolize that those who totally surrender at the feet of Goddess Valli, will be caressed and protected by Goddess Valli like her own child.

Glory of Goddess Kathayee

29. Goddess Kathayee who manifested in Siththadi in difference to the wishes of Lord Shiva is none but Goddess Valli in a different form and appearance. However, before we read the history of this temple, it is important to know

why Goddess Valli had to manifest as human and continue to stay in Bhooloka (earth) in different places.

30. Pundits say that she manifested to strengthen the function of Lord Muruga who had also manifested for some specific reason. Few others suggest that Goddess Valli had to stay in bhooloka as punishment for mocking her sister Deivanai. The assumption is completely wrong and unfounded.

31. The 'Valli malai thava peeda Swamigal' explained once "when Lord Muruga after his marriage with Goddess Valli took her to Skanda Giri, they were accorded warm welcome by Goddess Deivanai who was waiting there to receive them. She hugged her sister Goddess Valli in ecstasy and requested Lord Muruga to narrate her the story of her sister Goddess Valli. Responding to her sister's warmth and love, Goddess Valli on her part requested Goddess Deivanai to always stay with her. Thus, all three divine energies, namely Gnana Sakthi, Kriya Sakthi and Iccha Sakthi merged together on that spot."

32. When such were the facts how could there be enmity between the sisters and Goddess Valli getting cursed by her sister? Pundits opine that manifestation of Goddess Valli was nothing but union of Jeevathma (who is Goddess Valli) with Paramathma (who is Lord Muruga), the combined energy of which will illumine the wisdom and liberate one from ignorance during Kaliyuga.

33. Though Goddess Valli is indeed manifestation from Goddess Parasakthi herself, Goddess Valli's manifestation has to happen only through another divine to offset the boon accorded by Lord Brahma to Asura Soorasimman. Hence Goddess Valli along with her sister

manifested through the tears of Lord Mahavishnu and quickly took rebirth again to marry and strengthen the divine energies of Lord Muruga who had also manifested from Goddess Parvathi for specific reason in accordance with the norms of Lord Brahma's boon.

34. Had Goddess Valli manifested directly from the energies of Goddess Parvathi along with Lord Muruga then it would not have been possible for Goddess Valli to marry Lord Muruga, being she becomes his own sister. Therefore, this circuitous path had been adapted by Parasakthi to ensure that all three energies merge together to annihilate asura Soorasimman. The manifestation of all three are thus complicated but linked to a common purpose.

35. In fact, there is belief amongst some scholars that Lord Muruga is not embodiment of two divine female forces, both his two wives, but he is also insulated with the power of invisible third female energies who was released by Parasakthi herself in order to give Lord Muruga the ultimate power to annihilate Sooran, the demon asura awaiting death at his hands.

36. The third invisible female energy released by Goddess Parvathi immediately got converted into energized weapon called Gnana Vel to further enhance the energy of Lord Muruga. In this manner, Lord Muruga remain the embodiment of three female energies- the first with the energies of invisible Goddess Jyothi, his own sister in the form of a weapon Vel and secondly with the energies from his two wives- Goddess Deivanai as Kriya Sakthi and Goddess Valli as Ichcha Sakthi. (The aspect and antecedents of Goddess Jyothi has been explained in a researched article "Swarupa Vel: Skanda's sister Jyothi" submitted by Dr

Alagappa Alagappan in the First International Conference Seminar on Skanda Muruga at the Institute of Asian Studies, held in Chennai in the year 1998 which can be seen in the following link: <http://murugan.org/jyoti.htm>).

37. Further interesting aspect in the whole episode has been that the divines were free of caste and creed and each and every human on earth were dear to them equally. This fact is strengthened by the act of Parasakthi who opted to keep one of the three divine energies in the form of Goddess Valli, who in earth was brought by the Fowler /hunter community to marry Lord Muruga who was manifestation from divines Lord Shiva-Goddess Parvathi.

38. It is no wonder that the same Goddess Valli seated as Goddess Kathayee in Siththadi remains the tutelary deity of several families belonging to different sects including that of Brahmins. This itself speaks volumes on how Goddess Valli has been accorded special status in the divine world.

39. In a book consisting of 1350 verses by Kacciappa, under canto 267 in verse Kantha Puranam, the last Chapter Valli Ammai Tirumana Padalam (meaning marriage of Goddess Valli devi) mentions that Goddess Valli was born in a mountainous region called Valli Verppu (present Velore in Tamilnadu) and both Goddess Valli and Lord Muruga met, fell in love with each other and spent their lovely times till they got married there itself. There is also belief that Lord Muruga and Goddess Valli got married in places like Kathirkamam in Sri Lanka and in Siththadi.

40. During the period when both the divines lived on earth, the entire plains of Tamilnadu and Srilanka were one land without sea separating them and Lord Muruga and Goddess Valli wandered all over the region

freely. Considering the divine powers, one can realize that it was not difficult for them to move from one place to the other in seconds.

41. References are also found on Lord Muruga and Goddess Valli in another Tamil poetic text composed in 2nd-3rd centuries. The Tamil poetic text belonging to Kurinchi, sub type of Akam Poetry called Narinnai 82.4, contains references on Lord Muruga and Goddess Valli. All the above point out to the fact that both Lord Muruga and Goddess Valli may have lived and moved freely in many places in Tamilnadu during 2nd-3rd centuries.

42. The similarity of appearance of the Kathayee Amman idol of Siththadi temple with that of Goddess Valli of Valli Malai – standing posture with headgear and holding a lotus flower in right hand- certainly indicate that Goddess Valli must have indeed stayed in Sithadi village in the same form and appearance as seen in the Sithadi before departing to Devaloga leaving behind her human body which had over the years turned into granite stone portraying the appearance in which she lived and submerged inside the river Mudikondan.

43. Outwardly though Goddess Valli manifested and lived in human form with hunters tribe, undoubtedly she is direct divine energy of Goddess Parvathi only. Goddess Parvathi is one part of Parasakthi who rules the entire universe right from its inception till now and Goddess Kathayee being direct divine energy of Goddess Parvathi, her powers of divinity is also that of Parasakthi only. This thus reveals the true aspects and nature of divine powers enjoined by Sithadi Goddess Kathayee.

44. Then why did she prefer to stay in Bhoologa ? Lord Muruga's wife Deivanai alias Devasena manifested in Devaloga and natured there. Devasena meant the army for Devas i.e celestial. Therefore, she was asked to be in Devaloga to guard the celestial in Devaloga while Goddess Valli who manifested and brought up by the hunters tribe was commanded to stay in Bhoologa to protect the humans on earth.

45. While Goddess Valli is seen flanked by Lord Muruga in sanctum sanctorum in the temples, she is also worshiped as Goddess Valli in separate sanctum sanctorum. Contrary to such general stature, only in Sithadi she is worshiped in the name and form of Goddess Kathayee Amman.

46. In each one of the temples spread in Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore including in India, Lord Muruga, his consorts Goddess Valli and Goddess Deivanai are worshiped as Lord Muruga, Goddess Valli and Goddess Deivanai in the same form and appearance, in Sithadi Goddess Valli is called Goddess Kathayee which is not synonyms with the name of Valli. Lord Muruga is worshiped in different other names such as Senthil Murugan, Singara Velan, Palani Murugan, etc, etc all those names directly point out the God to be Lord Muruga.

47. Though it is true that all the three female energies- Goddess Valli, Goddess Deivanai and Goddess Jyothi were splinters of the same energy from Goddess Parasakthi carrying divergent divine energy powers to strengthen the act of Lord Muruga during Kaliyuga and to annihilate Soorasimman, only Goddess Valli amongst them remains the tutelary deity of many families while Goddess Deivaanai enjoins no such status till now as we know. All these facts

indicate that Goddess Valli's manifestation is special, specific and important in the world of divine.

Creation of three powers (Sakthi)

48. After the universe was created by Lord Brahma, both Devas (Celestials) and Asuras lived together serving divines in Devaloga and humans in universe. However, as time passed, the relation and harmony between Devas and asuras got strained. While the Devas generally lived in Devaloga, on occasions they travelled to earth or even took birth as human to redeem some of the curses. Asuras with evil mind greatly migrated to earth but those with good spirit kept up their own space in Devaloga and lived in harmony with Celestials.

49. The evil asuras began to slowly terrorize and humiliate people on earth and also troubled Celestials in Devaloga. The atrocities of Asuras reached such a stage that they claimed themselves to be superior to Celestials because they migrated from the divine world. Few of their commanders compelled the rishis and saints penancing on earth to worship them instead of offering prayers to divines.

50. One amongst the asuras who troubled everyone was Soorasimman who initially possessed good aspects when he was in Devaloga, but migrating to earth, he became the cruellest and wicket person. Those who resisted him were subjected to brutality and no one could fight or perish him because of a special boon that he had carried from Lord Brahma.

51. What was the nature of the boon that he possessed? Lord Brahma while granting the boon promised Soorasimman that he will remain eternal and take several

births and in each one of the births, he would embrace death only if and when he wished to take rebirth. Further, in each of his birth, his original soul will migrate into the new body carrying the same aspects of Soorasimman. However, his death will only happen at the hands of female-male divine energy which will appear in human form. The rider was that the two females will have to manifest from a male and the male from the energies of male-female both the manifestations without staying in the womb of a mother'. Why such a confusing rider in the boon and who can manifest in such a manner in human form to end the eternity of the soul? Since the boon was so mysterious and complicated, Soorasimman felt elated that he will remain ever invincible as no powers on earth can kill him, without realizing the mystery rider in the boon.

52. Upon hearing the news of the boon, worried Celestials when rushed to Lord Brahma to express their concern, Lord Brahma smilingly consoled and wait in patience as everything will turn to good for a shorter and wider cause.

53. The three energies to emerge were Goddess Deivaanai as Kriya Sakthi, Lord Muruga as Gnana Sakthi and Goddess Valli as Iccha Sakthi. Goddess Valli was to stay in Bhooloka in various temples as Goddess Valli barring Sithadi where she would be in the form of Goddess Kathayee to assist in the mission of Lord Muruga. Secondly in the same temple where she was to be enshrined, Goddess Parvathi would also stay in different other form.

54. The incarnations Gnana Sakthi (Power of Wisdom), Kriya Sakthi (Power of Action for the path of emotions & passion) and Iccha Sakthi (Power of Will for the path of

spirituality) were meant not only for the shorter cause of annihilating Soorasimman, but also for the wider cause which was powerful intervention of to guard humans from the disastrous effects and the atrocities expected in Kaliyuga.

55. If the Gnana Sakthi in the form of Lord Muruga after manifesting confined himself to the annihilation of Soorasimman which was the immediate shorter cause, the basic purpose of his manifestation would have been lost. Therefore, the Gnana Sakthi needed supportive energies such as Iccha and Kriya Sakthi to drag the Gnana Sakthi into the act of annihilation of Soorasimman and later to liberate and protect the suffering humans in Kali Yuga. Hence Parasakthi decided to create Lord Muruga as Gnana sakthi and Goddess Valli and Goddess Deivaanai as Kriya and Iccha sakthi in one stretch in circuitous and complicated manner.

Birth of Goddess Valli

56. Once it was decided to annihilate the soul of Soorasimman for ever, the Celestials anxiously waited to see how the events will unfold. As time passed, when the destined time for the annihilation of the soul of Soorasimman emerged, he took birth on earth in the name of Sooran. On hearing the birth of Sooran, the Celestials ran to Lord Brahma and requested him to do needful to eliminate Soorasimman once for all. Lord Brahma calmed them down since already stage was set for manifestation of three divine forces needed for the annihilation of Soorasimman.

57. At the same time when the celestial were pleading with Lord Brahma, in earth Lord Vishnu resting on

Adhishesha was deeply absorbed with one of the past enchanting dance moments of Lord Shiva. While mentally engrossed in the grace, beauty, majesty and grandeur of the dance of bliss, few drops of tears from the welled-up eyes of Lord Vishnu fell in ecstasy. The tears turned out into two girls and they were named Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli in deference to the mystery boon of Lord Brahma. Thus, the countdown to the annihilation of Soorasimman commenced with the birth of Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli through Lord Vishnu who manifested from the male part (Parabrahman) of Parasakthi when universe was created.

58. In the next stage of action elsewhere on earth, the divine energies of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi suddenly merged and fell in a bush without staying in the womb of Goddess Parvathi which in turn took the form of a child. The child –the third manifestation which fell on the grass bed was caressed by the waiting celestial as per the pre-determined act in the divine drama, and became Lord Muruga on earth. Thus, the third manifestation in human form which was destined to join with Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli at a later stage manifested. The next stage in the act was the rebirth of Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli.

59. The time passed as all the three manifestations grew. Once both Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli accidentally met beautiful young Lord Muruga in the form of a great warrior and thereafter they began to meet him frequently and their friendship turned into love affair. Unable to curb their attraction on the warrior

60. both of them went to Lord Vishnu and pleaded for his approval to marry the warrior even without knowing who he really was. Lord Vishnu acted innocently and posed as if

he was against their proposal to get married with an unknown warrior, but finally agreed to their request and approached Lord Muruga who was waiting for an opportune time to annihilate Sooran.

61. Initially Lord Muruga turned down the proposal and put two conditions. He wanted them to shed their present body and take rebirth- Amudavalli in Devaloga and Sundaravalli in Bhoologa and wait there till he reached out to them at an appropriate time after completing his mission. If they agreed to his proposal, then as symbolic gesture he would open his soul to them and they can have him as their heart mate. He promised that once his mission gets completed he would himself reach out to them and marry them formally in their rebirth. They accepted the proposal and promised to take immediate rebirth and wait for him.

62. Once Lord Muruga married them informally at heart, both Sundaravalli and Amurthavalli vanished and took rebirth. Events turned fast and Amudavalli took birth in Devaloga where Lord Indira adapted her as his daughter and entrusted the task of bringing her up to his royal elephant Airavatham. Since she grew in the care of Elephant Airavatham she got the name Devasena i.e. brought up by one of the guards (sena) of Devaloga (deva). In Tamil she was called Deivaanai (meaning Divine elephant's daughter).

63. Simultaneously Lord Mahavishnu wasted no time to manifest on earth to redeem a curse from Lord Indira which was meant to facilitate the manifestation of Goddess Valli. As he took the form of a saint and sat in penance in a dense forest area, without the knowledge of Lord Vishnu, his consort Goddess Lakshmi too took the form of a deer

and stayed at a distance guarding her husband who was sitting in tapas.

64. At the same time Sundaravalli too came there in invisible form and waited for an opportune time to get birth from Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. In the midst of tapas when the saint opened his eyes, mesmerized with the beauty of the deer he gazed at her with lust thus causing the deer to instantly conceive, reason being the rays of lust from the saint la Mahavishnu intruded into her body. Waiting for such an opportune moment invisible Sundaravalli quickly merged her soul into the lust rays and entered into the body of Goddess Lakshmi who was in the form of a deer. The merger of lust rays turned into a female child which instantly fell into a bush. Thus, the infant Goddess Valli was born in earth without staying in the womb of Goddess Lakshmi.

65. No sooner Goddess Valli was born, Lord Vishnu was relieved of the curse and Goddess Lakshmi too took her original form. Both left the child lying in a bush and went back to Vaikunda. The name of the place where the child lay was called Valli Kuzhi. In Tamil Valli meant ' sweet yam ' and Kuzhi means the pit. By chance Nambirajan, a hunter saw the abandoned baby, took her with him and brought her up in his house with great care. She was called Valli since she was found in the pit of sweet yam (Valli kizhangu). Thus, Goddess Kathayee initially took birth in earth as Goddess Valli.

Goddess Valli becomes Kathayee

66. When Valli grew, as per the custom of the hunter tribes Valli was sent to the millet field to guard the crops

against the hunting birds and other animals. The custom of the hunter tribe was to address the marriageable girls guarding the fields as Aayee (meaning tribal woman) and as days passed, Goddess Valli too began to be addressed as Katha Aayee i.e. the one who guarded their millet field. This is how Goddess Valli got the name Kathayee much later.

67. Once both Goddess Deivaanai and Goddess Valli were born, Lord Muruga engaged himself in the act of annihilation of the soul of Soorasimman. After completing his mission, several interesting events with divine fixed drama transpired fast and at the end of the drama Lord Muruga got married both Goddess Deivaanai in Devaloga and Goddess Valli on earth as she was in human form living with the hunter tribe .

Goddess Valli becomes Goddess Kathayee

68. As said earlier, Lord Muruga had to stay in Bhooloka as Gnana Sakthi (Power of Wisdom) along with his consorts Kriya Sakthi (Power of Action for the path of emotions & passion) and Iccha Sakthi (Power of Will for the path of spirituality) to transform the humans during the emergence of Kaliyuga. While Goddess Deivaanai continued to stay with Lord Muruga boosting his divine energies along with that of hers, Goddess Valli as Iccha Sakthi travelled across the universe to sit in temples either with the Lord or alone in sanctums to activate the minds of humans to bring them under the shield of Lord Muruga who was to protect them from the ill effects of Kaliyuga.

69. One such temple where Goddess Valli enshrined herself for such a cause was Sithadi Kathayee temple. She knew well that unless the ignorance of the humans is shed

and they surrendered to Lord Muruga, the disastrous effects of Kaliyuga will cause immense tragedy in their life. Though Goddess Valli manifested in different parts of Universe in different forms, she was continued to be revered only as Goddess Valli except in Sithadi where she ensured that her form and appearance will be much different and devotees would worship her in the name Goddess Kathayee.

70. There is a belief that Goddess Valli was born in Valli Malai, a small hill situated in North Arcot district near the town Walaja (in Velore town) in Tamilnadu. It is believed that Nambirajan brought up Valli only in this place called Valli Maalai. Lord Muruga reportedly met Goddess Valli in Valli Malai, fell in love with him and married her here and spent several years there. Since Goddess Valli was brought up by the hunter community, as per their tribal custom, she tied up her head like a head gear.

71. Reasons are plenty to believe that Goddess Valli may have travelled to Sithadi from Valli Malai and stayed there in the form of Kathayee in human form till she returned to Devaloga along with Lord Muruga leaving her human body inside Mudikondan river. The resemblance and style of the headgear and style of holding a flower in right hand of Goddess Valli malai Goddess Valli with that of Goddess Sithadi Kathayee indicates that the Goddess must have stayed in these two places in the same form and style before shedding her body in Sithadi. When she shed her human body, she must have ensured that her human body got buried in land over which the river flew and turned into granite stone over the years retaining the same appearance of hers and to be traced out centuries later to get enshrined in Sithadi temple.

72. The reason for believing so stems from the fact that while the idols of Goddess Valli enshrined in the temples appear both in agamic and non agamic style, conforming to the norms of Shilpa Shastra, in Sithadi temple astonishingly the granite stone statue of Goddess Valli reflects the human form - portraying three head gears without crown on her head.

Temple for Sithadi Goddess Kathayee Amman was born

73. Kanchamalai muni, an ardent disciple of Lord Shiva and disciple of saint Moolar was one amongst those who attended the marriage function of Lord Muruga with Goddess Deivanai and Goddess Valli. After witnessing the marriage, the muni came down to earth and sat in tapas. Kanchamalai muni was exponent in the art of Ashtami siddhi. It is heard that Kancha muni wore only clothes made of herbal leaves and remained in tapas for over 1000 years in a cave. He was also known as Kalangi Muni and was master to Saint Bhogar who made the Nava Bhashana idol of Lord Muruga enshrined in Palani hill in Tamilnadu.

74. Pleased with his tapas, Lord Shiva appeared before Kanchamalai Muni and instructed that he construct a temple for Goddess Valli in Siththadi in which separate sanctum sanctorum for Goddess Parvathi and Lord Muruga are also to be constructed since Goddess Valli was destined to stay there to aid Lord Muruga in his mission during Kali Yuga. Kanchamalai muni felt that though he had possessed mystic powers, without the help of humans it would not be possible for him to construct a shrine as instructed by Lord Siva, but he promised to carry out the orders and therefore

immediately reached invisible to others Sithadi which was then full of Thina (millet) fields. Groups of huts were seen scattered here and there. Since most of the agriculturists in that area cultivated only millets the village was called land of millets.

75. Once Kanchamalai muni reached the village, he stood below a tree in invisible form and called a Brahmin walking at a distance away 'son come here'. Hearing voice of invisible, the Brahmin walked towards the place from where the call came but could not find anyone there. When the Brahmin started walking back in panic, again the invisible voice called 'son, do not get frightened, I have come here to guard the village. If you perform Pooja to me in this place everyday, I will guard this village'. Astonished Brahmin walked towards the tree from where the voice came and noticed heap of vermillion lying on the ground under the tree.

76. He believed that some unknown divine hiding inside the heap of vermillion might have only called him. He also believed that the divine may have come there to protect the village; he was not aware that the voice was that of Kanchamalai muni. Thus, the first stage to establish a temple for Goddess Kathayee was successfully set by Kancha muni.

77. In the ancient periods of time, every village used to have worship sites with Village deities called Grama devatha enshrined in them. Generally, warriors in the village, or those who protected the villagers from atrocities of others or volunteered unconditional help in natural calamities etc were held in esteem by the villagers and a small culvert like things used to be erected where they were buried or lived

and thereafter those places used to be treated as sacred spots and periodical worship offered.

78. The community feared that if those pious souls were disrespected they may in act of vengeance spread dreadful diseases or cause disasters in their villages. The village community therefore treated the unknown souls as Guardian angels (Souls), Village Deity or Village God and worshiped them. The evil souls which wandered as Ghosts for the sins committed, if attempted to enter the villages would be driven off by the Guardian Deity of the villages, the community believed. Such belief led to the establishment and worship of Village Deity or Village God in the Villages.

79. Therefore, the Brahmin began to worship the heap of vermillion from next day praying 'Oh, mother only you have to protect this village'. Every day he offered flowers to the heap of vermillion. Once Kanchamalai muni laid the path to build a worship place he immediately left the place after Goddess Valli manifested there in an invisible form to take over the rest of the act to get a temple established for her.

80. Every day, after the Brahmin concluded his prayer, instantly by way of screeching sound of lizards, birds or some sounds of animal, she would indicate that his prayer has been accepted. As days passed, the Brahmin was troubled by a nagging thought. How could he protect the heap of Vermilion from the heat rays of the sun which fall over it? Highly concerned, he began to keep his hand over the vermillion heap like an umbrella to stop sun rays falling on it. Days passed.

81. Once the monsoon set in and rains started the Brahmin, was questioned by the mysterious voice as to how

he was going to protect her from the rains. He had no answer to offer, thought of several options, but finally decided to cover the heap of vermillion with an idol made of clay and continued the prayers. The rains did not wash off the heap of vermillion kept below fairly big clay idol. After few days when he realized that the idol made of clay would also dissolve in rain, he sat in meditation praying to the divine to give a permanent solution to protect her from fury of rains. The display of the power of divine was such that even though heavy rains lashed inundating the areas, the land around the tree and the vermillion heap mysteriously remained unaffected by the rains in any manner.

82. When awestruck Brahmin continued to offer prayers in the same place, one day he experienced inner vision by the appearance of several squares merging together displaying a female deity within, whose beauty could not be explained or expressed in plain words. The unknown deity was seen in the midst of triangles made in seven structures. In a short while the unknown deity spoke 'my son, I am the same deity who governed the universe earlier and manifested here to protect the village. I am inside the river running nearby displayed with three head gears. If you take me out from inside the river and offer worship I will stay here to alleviate the sufferings of the people and protect the village as well.

83. Once the voice disappeared and the Brahmin came to his senses, the appearance of the deity too faded away from inner vision. Next morning the Brahmin went to the river bed, sat in the river bank watching the river all through the day till he suddenly saw bunch of three head gears

floating and disappearing into the water. Once he saw the three headgears, quickly he jumped into the river and brought out the idol with three head gears.

84. He took it to the same site where he had kept the heap of vermillion, constructed a small platform, spread the heap of vermillion collected from the previous spot where he was worshiping her, and enshrined the new idol in place of the old clay idol and began to worship it. He imagined her to be 'Aye (elderly woman)' who had manifested there to guard the village. The nick name Aye slowly became to be referred as Kathayee meaning the Aye who has come to guard the village.

85. Sometimes in anxiety, we commit certain mistakes unknowingly. Similarly, the Brahmin too committed a sin. While clearing the old platform to install the new idol taken out from the river, he threw the old clay idol into the river feeling it was no more needed without even realizing for a moment that the old idol worshiped by him for so many days had only shielded the vermillion from getting washed in rain. Next morning when the Brahmin concluded prayers and as usual waited to hear Aye acknowledging his prayer, only an eerie of silence continued. Shocked Brahmin when even after calling in loud voice 'mother where are you... mother ..where are you?'. There was no response and she refused to appear before him. After some time, an invisible voice came from the air asking him not to search for her anymore as she had already left the place along with the clay idol thrown into the river. He realized his foolish act, which of course was not intentional and cannot be redeemed since the clay would have completely dissolved into the water.

86. He began to cry aloud seeking pardon for his unintentional act committed out of ignorance. In spite of it, if she still refused to appear before him, he would have no other option but to tie the new idol with his body and jump into the river to commit suicide. Crying like a hapless child, he sought her pardon recalling how he had wholeheartedly and painstakingly plucked the flowers and offered pooja to the vermillion heap. Blaming his two legs which led him to the river bed to throw the clay idol, he began to do sit ups continuously and intensely even as blood began to ooze from the tissues in the legs. No mother can witness the agony and distress of her child....she finally appeared before him in her true form- Goddess Kathayee- and blessed him. She said 'son, I admire your sincerity and pardoned you. I manifested in this land with three headgear, each one symbolizing mother of wisdom (Gnanambika), mother who merged into your heart (Ottiyaana roopini) and finally as mother to bless everyone with kind heart (Karunamayi). I promise that from now on I will stay here guiding and guarding all of you'. Saying so she merged into the new idol which he got from inside the river.

87. Goddess Kathayee appeared before him the next day too to further instruct that since she was brought up by Nambirajan (Nambi in Tamil meant belief) she would not let down anyone who surrendered to her and alleviate their sufferings by driving away the ignorance and evils in mind like how the birds were driven away from the millet field.

88. She expressed her desire to be in the company of Kanchamalai Muni, Lord Vinayaga and Lord Muruga besides Goddess Parvathi. Further she desired the seven munis like 'Sem muni ' with warm pink complexion, 'Vazhu muni ' who

drives away evil thoughts, 'Kumba muni ' who guide one to get abundance wealth, 'Lada muni ' who guide in enhancing wisdom, 'Jada muni ' in yogic stature, 'Natha muni ' bless one in cool posture and 'Muthu muni ' who adorn garland of pearls all over his body be seated appropriately in her temple.

89. According to the temple legend of Kovilur Goddess Kathayee Amman, the seven Munis were sons of Nambirajan who brought up Goddess Valli. There is another folklore that suggest that these seven munis were the guardian deities (Parivar devathas) of Goddess Kathayee. In some of the villages, folk songs are sung in the name of Kathayee Amman Thavam (the tapas of Goddess Kathayee i.e waiting to marry Lord Muruga) and Mannar Saami Kathayee thirumanam. The song narrates the events of the marriage of Kathayee with Mannar Saami meaning King of Kings i.e Lord Muruga.

90. Outside the temple complex Kanchamalai, Siva holding a lotus in his hand is seen in a separate sanctum sanctorum. His left hand is found kept over a cobra. It is interesting to see that Goddess Kathyayini too hold a lotus in her hand in similar fashion. At different ends, statues for Veerabaghu muni with Veera Mitra Bommi, nine saints, Lada sanyasi, Danvanthri muni, and Pechchayi Amman are seen installed. Vilva and neem trees are considered sacred trees of the temple.

Legend on Pachaivaazhi Amman (Kathyayini)

Pachaivaazhi Amman (Kathyayini) mother of Murugan too is seated in another sanctum sanctorum in the same temple. Several thousands of years ago when Goddess Parvathi had

to take birth as human to redeem a curse on her, Maharishi Kathyayana who was in tapas sought Lord Siva's grace to get Goddess Parvathi born to him as his daughter so that he could get her married to Lord Shiva. If we see the legends and stories in Purana, you will find that both the God and Goddesses have taken birth on earth as humans to redeem curses and thereafter attained their original status by marrying their spouses.

Thus, the same divine couples have married and remarried their own wives again and again with rebirths. In one such instance Goddess Parvathi had to redeem a curse and stay in Bhooloka. Keeping the same in mind, Lord Shiva granted the boon of Maharishi Kathyayana and ensured that Goddess Parvathi was born to him. When she attained marriageable age, she sat in tapas praying Lord Shiva to appear before and take her back as his consort.

Satisfied with her tapas he appeared before Goddess Parvathi and in the presence of Rishis namely Siva, Dharma, Nada, Yoga, Vass, Puruda and few other great saints Lord Shiva married with her as per the wish of Maharishi Kathyayana. After marriage Goddess Kathyayini sat in a separate sanctum in the temple of Goddess Kathayee where her curse was redeemed to marry Lord Shiva again. Thus, it is believed that those who observed Kathyayini Vrath (Fast) in this temple, the obstacles on their marriage gets removed and childless couples are rewarded with children.

End Note

In a village called Sengudi in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, there is a small Goddess Kathayee Amman shrine. Some more villages where Goddess Kathayee

Amman is worshiped are Udayar Kovil in Thanjavur district Pasumbadiyaar Goddess Kathayee Amman temple, Sakottai Goddess Kathayee Amman Temple, Pudukkottai Vallavaari Goddess Kathayee Amman Temple, Thiruththuraipoondi Goddess Kathayee Amman temple, Vaduvur Thenpathi Goddess Kathayee Amman temple and another Goddess Kathayee Amman temple in Sithadi village itself. Velankanni magazhi vaaz Goddess Kathayee Amman temple is also famous. But in all those temples Goddess Kathayee is worshiped only as Village deity.

Concluded